

## Director's Message - October 2008

Written by Lisa-Michele Church, Executive Director's Office

Sunday, 19 October 2008 17:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 18 March 2009 16:11

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Last month we went through a difficult time with the Special Session at the legislature and the budget cuts. I appreciate all the support of the employees in protecting our services to people wherever possible.



We took the approach that we would look at cuts by program, not just make them across the board. I believe across the board approaches can weaken all of us. We were asked to come up with a 3% overall cut, due to state revenues being down and the general economic downturn. I took the following steps in deciding which cuts to recommend: 1) review all 75 DHS programs, 2) review efficiencies where possible, 3) stop spending new appropriations where people were not yet in services, 4) review preventive programs for cuts where not providing acute services, and 5) review acute services for cuts.

Fortunately - for this round - we were able to keep most of the cuts in the categories of administrative expenses, efficiencies achieved through attrition, or not spending new money. In some areas we did have to go into preventive and acute services, because 3% of DHS general fund is \$11 million and we do not have that much money in strictly administrative expenses. I also will not cut administrative services where it compromises accountability or health and safety, such as in licensing. It is difficult to take cuts in administration when we already lost funding in 2002-2004 that was never restored, and also utility and fuel costs go up each year, for which we are not reimbursed.

In consultation with the DHS management team we prioritized DHS programs in terms of value. Higher priority programs are those that are a) required by law, b) provide services to those in acute need, c) bring in revenue or defray expenses, d) protect immediate health and safety, e) have a proven track record of quantifiable outcomes, f) provide direct services to people, and g) have federal or other funding match. As a result of this analysis, several DHS programs were protected from further analysis for budget cuts.

After we presented our DHS recommended cuts, our legislative committee asked for an additional 1% cut. I could not see where we would take that additional cut. After debate, they

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voted to make about 2.8% in cuts, but in some cases they were made retroactive back to July 1, 2008. This gave the cuts a greater impact.

We had some great employees at the Foster Care Citizen Review Board that were de-funded completely and we are working with them to find substitute employment. Also our disabilities ombudsman was de-funded but we were able to move him back to the Division in another role. Other agency employees also suffered under the cuts and we will delay filling some positions. It is a very painful time when I know you have worked so hard to accomplish so much.

As the economy continues to have challenges, DHS may be asked to look at further cuts in the 2009 legislative session. I will keep you informed as to the strategy we are pursuing and please feel free to email me with any input you might have from the field. I appreciate the teamwork that went into the Special Session and it makes me proud that we are still able to serve Utahns with the level of excellence that you all maintain.